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UNCLAS ABUJA 002437

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DEPT FOR G/TIP, INL AND AF/RA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: KCRM KWMN PHUM NI ECOWAS

SUBJECT: ENGAGING ECOWAS ON REGIONAL TIP ACTIVITIES

**¶1.** In recent meetings with officials of the ECOWAS Secretariat's Legal Affairs Department, RNLEO presented the

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framework of a G/TIP-funded project to strengthen the Secretariat's capacity to implement the new ECOWAS Plan of

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Action Against Trafficking in Persons (TIP). This project, funded with \$350,000 (FY02), will be implemented through the UN Office of Drug Control and Crime Prevention (UNODCCP).

**¶2.** Director of Legal Affairs Roger Laloupo and his deputy, Henrietta Didigu, responded enthusiastically to the news of prospective USG funding for the nascent ECOWAS regional initiative. Laloupo noted the fortuitous timing of the offer, as the Secretariat feels under pressure to show tangible progress in implementing the Plan of Action prior to the December 2002 ECOWAS Summit, when Executive Secretary Chambas will be required to present a report on the Plan's execution.

**¶3.** Laloupo and Didigu noted their desire to first address the legal and policy demands of the ECOWAS Plan of Action. These are contained in the "Legal Framework and Policy Development" section of the Plan, and include the setting up of permanent implementation committees or task forces in each member-state as well as the creation of an anti-TIP desk or unit within the ECOWAS Secretariat in Abuja. A full-time anti-TIP officer at the Secretariat could coordinate member-states' efforts to set up national task forces and harmonize laws and policies in line with both the ECOWAS Plan of Action and the UN Transnational Organized Crime Convention's Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.

**¶4.** The Secretariat also hopes to establish a fund to cover the costs of short-term protection and the repatriation of rescued trafficking victims within the ECOWAS region. Requests for use of these funds would come from member-states' national anti-TIP task forces or committees and would be coordinated by the new ECOWAS Secretariat Coordination Unit. Didigu stated that the Secretariat looks to the international donor community to assist in setting up this fund.

**¶5.** RNLEO noted that it might be best to let an international NGO or organization like UNICEF or IOM set up and oversee such a fund on behalf of ECOWAS, given the extremely limited capacity at the Secretariat to manage effectively programs such as this. RNLEO further suggested that USAID's regional programs might be considered as a possible source of assistance to help ECOWAS build capacity in this regional repatriation effort.

**¶6.** Didigu and Laloupo disclosed that the Secretariat plans to organize, and together with UNODCCP, host a regional seminar in October on coordinating implementation of the Plan of Action. This two-day seminar would be held back-to-back with a two-day conference ECOWAS intends to have with representatives of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) to help ECCAS adopt a regional Plan of Action similar to the one developed by ECOWAS. No venue has yet been selected for the two events, but Accra is favored.

**¶7.** Action for G/TIP: Please provide funding data for this project and guidance on grant modalities for an agreement with UNODCCP as soon as possible.

JETER